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Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

H470
For first teaching in 2015

H470/02 Summer 2024 series

Contents

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Paper 2 series overview

Responses to all three questions in H470/02 covered the full range of the mark scheme and there were few instances of candidates not attempting tasks, though on occasion candidates wrote more than was necessary in their response to one question at the expense of one or both others. While it was not unusual for individual achievement to vary within and between tasks/Assessment Objectives, there were some particularly strong, focused and convincing answers offered to all three tasks.

Where answers were overly long and/or less well-focused, predictions of what would be found in the texts often took up valuable examination time. Candidates are advised to concentrate their attention on analysis of the actual text and to avoid generic comments around expectations that are not supported by, or clearly subverted by, the material in hand.

Reproduction of knowledge and outlines of concepts – often unrelated to the texts being discussed – provided false security for some candidates and limited opportunities for relevant connections to be made. However, many candidates were generally aware of the need to focus on language and exploration of texts' construction of meaning.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
• explored and analysed language use in all questions • presented a range of ideas in some depth and detail • before writing their answer, had identified in the text(s) those language features and patterns most likely to be of interest • used theory to explore texts and used texts to explore theory – making relevant connections between them • offered clear, carefully constructed responses • considered the contexts of a text 'through the lens' of its language.	• focused on content over language • described rather than analysed the text(s) • reproduced learned sections of theory/history rather than applying what they knew • confused and/or misrepresented theorists • spent far too long on one of the three questions • offered simplistic, generalised points • used basic subject terminology incorrectly.

Key point: exploring texts
The most successful responses show evidence of candidates having explored each text with an open mind. They consider alternative interpretations for any interesting details they discover, drawing on what they have learned and applying it to make relevant comparisons and/or connections.

Section A overview

The transcript included a wide range of useful examples for exploration and most candidates were able to identify at least some potentially interesting features. Attempts to label examples used mostly appropriate terminology, though stronger answers went beyond simply labelling to discuss the evidence they had highlighted and make connections to relevant theories. More successful answers sought to interpret and evaluate the data, avoiding assertions of what it 'proved' or 'disproved' in favour of careful consideration of the complexity of the processes involved.

Question 1

1   Using the appropriate terminology to explain your findings, examine the language development stage of the child-participant as evidenced in the transcript. You should identify and analyse the phonology, grammar and meaning of his utterances.

Use your knowledge of theories and concepts of child language acquisition to support your answer.   **[20]**

Most candidates were able to consider phonology, grammar and/or meaning on some level. Less successful answers often adopted an assertive or overly simplistic approach – trying to force into the discussion references to theorists they had heard of rather than those who were most appropriate to the discussion in hand. On occasion, responses missed opportunities to fully engage with the material – for example, by focussing too heavily on the father's contributions at the expense of those of the child participant, Jamal. Others painstakingly labelled individual phonemes (not always correctly) and/or listed theorists and stages less relevant to the data.

Candidates generally observed that many of the utterances included or revolved around objects, and references to Nelson's findings were common. Many went on to try to discuss references to the various sea creatures/puzzles in terms of hypernyms/hyponyms (Aitchison), occasionally with some success. References to the exchange about sea horses and its links to Vygotsky/zone of proximal development were also explored and exploited by some candidates. Considerations of the exceptions to Jamal's largely standard pronunciation, '/f/aʊ/n/də/' [flounder] and '/kæb/' [crab] (consonant cluster reduction) in many answers often led to evaluations informed by the 'Fis' Study – Berko and Brown (1960) and/or Shriberg's model for speech sound acquisition.

Often candidates who missed opportunities to target higher marks had not recognised the limitations of such a small data set and/or the complexities of language acquisition. Some of these diluted evidence of understanding by commenting on 'worrying features' of Jamal's 'incorrect' use language or attempting unwisely to support judgements related to a grammatical stage by reference to phonology or lexis. Those who focused more carefully on what was happening in the extract and explored what they found there were often best placed to demonstrate understanding of stage theory.

Where candidates considered Jamal's father's interventions these could be rewarded as evidence of knowledge and understanding provided the focus remained clearly on the child participant. There were some helpful links made to Bruner and Skinner, as well as less secure and confused references to acronyms that appeared to be aiming at discussion of Child Directed Speech and Language Acquisition Support Systems.

> **Misconception**
>
> ? The term LASS (Language Acquisition Support System) was proposed by Jerome Bruner and relates to interactionist theory of language acquisition. It should not be confused with the term LAD (Language Acquisition Device) used by Noam Chomsky to denote the inherent capacity of humans for learning language.

Exemplar 1

Interestingly though. Jamal does implement a contracted auxiliary in 'that's mermaid'. Auxiliaries are Brown's 7th inflection and generally demonstrate fairly advanced grammatical knowledge, particularly in the contracted form. Oppositione However, it is also evident that Jamal's father frequently uses this contraction as so it is possible that Jamal has picked it up through imitation. Alternatively, this could simply highlight the complexity of language acquisition, showing how not every child will learn in a specified order of stages.

In Exemplar 1, having already discussed Jamal's omission of determiners, this response goes on here to consider one of their highlighted examples further – noting with interest the contracted copula verb. The reference to Brown's stages is helpful, with the understanding that the shortened form of the verb 'to be' might be expected to occur much later. The willingness to consider alternatives - including the most likely conclusion that it has been acquired as a single lexical unit - suggests strong understanding and a confident handling of the data. This willingness to explore continues in the rest of the answer over a wide range of well-selected examples and builds to offer convincing evidence of assured understanding of the relationship between theory and practice.

Section B overview

The resource booklet introduced Text B as having been taken from an online article from Wired.com, adding that Wired is an American magazine and website that produces articles about technology and culture. Repeating that information, rather than considering how it might inform their analysis, was a feature of less successful answers that often then struggled to explore and evaluate language use and relied on summarising content instead. Some carried on in terms of unprofitable, generalised discussions around 'expectations' of online articles and/or the technology of modern video games. Others adopted a concept-led discursive style of response and, in doing so, missing the focus on language that is required in this task.

Question 2

2   Using your understanding of relevant ideas and concepts, investigate how language features and contextual factors construct meanings in this text.   **[24]**

Stronger answers to this task evaluated in some detail how contextual factors and language features might be associated with construction of meaning in this text. Many were able to identify the sense of ongoing dialogue with the reader and explored this in relation to different kinds of reader (including, but not limited to, the ''90s kid'). Answers in the midrange had often identified characteristic features of a multi-modal text and/or labelled features such as the use of extended metaphor, though often missed opportunities exploited in stronger answers to consider how these contributed to the text.

Several candidates attempted to apply conversational and spoken theories to the written data, linking to theories of limited relevance in this mode. Where candidates had instead focused on register and distance between producer and receiver, they were often better placed to evidence a reasonable understanding of the data, make relevant connections (for example with Fairclough and/or Goodman) and target higher marks.

Partially successful answers – sometimes those working line-by-line through the text without a secure sense of the whole – had often over-looked entirely explicit reference to gender/targeting of female gamers as well as the use of humour in the descriptions around the Tamagotchi's 'death'. Those exploring the text with the relationship between producer and receiver in mind, curious to see what they would find, were often able to discuss and exploit the various assumptions about shared values and knowledge to good effect.

Exemplar 2

Towards the end of the text, there is a clear shift to examine the wider social repercussions of the Tamagotchi craze, particularly that of their representations of gender. The producer seems to present themselves as neutral in this debate, though still socially aware (a necessary image for a pop culture site) through their use of direct quotations from knowledgeable contributors: "After the first..." "The Tamagotchi very much reflects..." The use of direct quotes is perhaps to distance the producer from the opinions, although it may also be intended to increase the text's facticity, particularly as its mitigation ~~through page~~ of titles "managing director & chief Tamagotchi officer" & "professor of English at Husson University" presents both speakers as knowledgeable as well as affording them some social & personal power (Wareing) due to their roles.

In Exemplar 2, there is tentative language used to present some persuasive evaluation of how the producer uses language and what this might suggest to the reader and/or achieve in context. The candidate draws on judiciously selected examples and understanding of relevant concepts and issues to inform their analysis of the text's patterns of language use.

Section C overview

The two texts in section C were closely linked in terms of topic, though differed in genre and approach. This allowed most candidates to access the question well, demonstrate some ability to explore the two texts and go at least some way to consider what they suggested about language change.

Almost all responses seen in this series compared Text C and D concurrently, considering features of each text as they moved through language levels. This often proved helpful to begin to explore connections and target AO4. Stronger responses had remembered that, in addition to comparison, there should be links to language change/development.

Some candidates limited their discussion to expected differences between texts from different times irrespective of the evidence in these texts and/or reproduced lengthy accounts of historical language change only very loosely related (if at all) to the texts in hand. Candidates are reminded that this is a synoptic task which means a full range of concepts can be used to illuminate discussion of language change, including ideas of representation, lexical and semantic processes of change and that their comments in relation to change need to be rooted in examination and comparison of the two texts.

Question 3

3   By detailed analysis of the writing in both passages, discuss and illustrate variations in language between the early years of the 20th and the 21st centuries. In your answer you should explore the ways language is used in each text as well as how contextual factors influence the way meaning is constructed. **[36]**

The stronger sense of the individual in the earlier of these two texts, was often a starting point for answers in the midrange. Both texts, despite their many differences, had at their heart a description of stage fright and candidates often explored helpfully how the anecdotal approach of the memoir extract related to/recreated the writer's own experience for the benefit of her fans/those interested in her success, compared to Text D, a guide aimed at aspiring or less experienced student-performers. The explicit reframing of 'stage fright' as 'performance anxiety' in the more recent text was noted by many candidates, with some going on to consider how the use of language reflected changing attitudes in society.

The 'open-minded spirit of enquiry' advised in previous reports for this component was key to interpreting this dataset well, finding and exploring examples of change within and between these texts and establishing patterns. Some candidates missed opportunities to do this. There were, for example, candidates who noted religious references in the earlier text (such as 'for Heaven's sake!') but assumed there would be none and/or over-looked their use ('Crucified in Polyester') in the more modern text. Conversational tone in Text D, created partly through use of sentences starting with connectives, was highlighted by many as reassuring and often cross referenced with the use of dialogue in Text C with suggestions that it helped to 'recreate the drama of the moment, typical of a narrative'. Fewer though went on to consider the imagined scenario in Text D ('Finally the day has arrived') and its intended effect. Many identified the use of subheadings in Text D as typical of online texts in that indicated to readers what was coming up next, but did not consider the chapter title pre-empting the action in Text C. Many candidates were able to identify figurative language used in Text C and offer various (if not always useful/accurate) suggestions of why that might be, though missed it in Text D. Stronger, data-led responses were able to use these and other similarities as a means of questioning the relevance of any theory they had in mind and to suggest possible reasons for the decisions made by each producer.

Across the range of achievement, candidates had often identified examples of non-contemporary phrasing, and/or semantic shift. Stronger answers did more than simply label what they had found, balancing considerations of internal and external aspects of change to suggest how these and other examples within the texts might be indicative of the society in which the texts were produced.

Exemplar 3

The title of 'Mr. Eluser' also could represent a general shift in formality between the 20th and 21st century as it is increasingly less common to refer to someone of significance with the title 'Mr' (as demonstrated through 'Jim Carrey'). This idea is furthered through example like the verb phrase 'present myself' which, whilst is not archaic, is not a phrase as modernly commonly used. This shift in formality is also evident in text D, for example, through the use of starting with the conjunction 'so' and use of humerous titles like 'crucified in polyester'. This represents a general shift to the acceptance of informal registers used in written texts.

In Exemplar 3, this section of a successful response to Question 3 connects salient features from both texts, exploring and explaining them with clarity to make points about change based on patterns of language use across the data set.

Assessment for learning: range of reading

Students of English language should be encouraged to read widely, sampling different text types, periods and genres with a view to building awareness of the varying ways and contexts in which language might be used. They should reflect on their individual reading – some find it useful to keep a journal and/or a scrapbook – comparing it to other interesting articles and thoughts they may encounter over the course of their studies.

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What are our online courses?

Our online courses are self-paced eLearning courses designed to help you deliver, mark and administer internal assessment for our qualifications. They are suitable for both new and experienced teachers who want to refresh their knowledge and practice.

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- learn about the key principles and processes of internal assessment and standardisation

- gain a deeper understanding of the marking criteria and how to apply them consistently and accurately

- see examples of student work with commentary and feedback from OCR moderators

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- the roles and responsibilities of teachers, assessors, internal verifiers and moderators

- the principles and methods of standardisation

- the best practices for collecting, storing and submitting evidence

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- the structure and content of the NEA units

- the assessment objectives and marking criteria for the NEA units

- examples of student work with commentary and feedback for the NEA units

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We are also developing courses for some of the examined units, which will be available soon.

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